

what's up?

What's it all about?

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are spread through sexual contact with another person who is infected. Every year approximately 4 million teens in the U.S.—about 1 in 4 sexually active teens—get STIs. Many STIs are curable. Other STIs have treatable symptoms, but cannot be cured. STIs often go untreated for 3 main reasons:

- **Many STIs show no symptoms.**
- Long-term diseases such as sterility, pain, and certain cancers may not appear until years after the initial infection.
- Even though STIs are among the most common type of infections in the U.S., there is often shame and embarrassment about STIs, so we don't talk about them.

Why does it matter?

STIs spread easily

It is common for STIs to be passed from one person to another unintentionally because the infected person had no symptoms. **Most people with STIs do not know they are infected.**

STIs cause health problems

Untreated STIs can cause serious harm, including, but not limited to sterility, pain, and stillbirths. Some STIs can cause cell changes leading to cervical cancer in women and penile cancer in men.

STIs increase the spread of HIV

Untreated STIs, with or without symptoms, make it easier to get other STIs, including HIV. Young women affected by STIs, such as gonorrhea and chlamydia, are 2 to 5 times more vulnerable to HIV infection than women without other STIs.

What are the details?

- In 2002, more than 6,200 STIs were reported among Washington's youth, 10 to 19 years old.
- The most common STIs for teens are genital warts (HPV), chlamydia, and gonorrhea.
- In Washington, rates of reported chlamydia infections are highest among girls 15 to 19 years old. In 2002, over 5,100 cases of chlamydia were reported among boys and girls in this age group.
- Studies have found that 28% to 46% of girls under 25 in the U.S. are infected with HPV.
- HPV and herpes can be spread by skin-to-skin contact.
- People can have more than one STI at a time.
- Nationally, about 40% of sexually active high school students did not use a condom at last sexual intercourse.
- About a third of adolescents 15 to 17 years old in the U.S. have engaged in oral sex, but 1-in-5 are unaware that oral sex can transmit STIs.
- Teen girls are biologically more susceptible than boys or older women to gonorrhea, chlamydia and HIV.
- Nationally, half of all new HIV infections occur in those under 25.

SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTIONS

INFORMATION FOR ADULTS WHO CARE ABOUT TEENS

What can I do?

When a teen turns to you for information about preventing STIs, what would you advise? Here are some things you can say:

- If you don't have sex, you have much less of a chance of getting STIs.
- Don't get drunk or high.
- Having fewer sex partners reduces your risk—make wise choices.
- Many STIs have no symptoms, and you can get infected or infect other people without knowing it.
- Most physical exams won't include STI tests unless you ask. Tell the clinician you'd like to be tested.
- Don't forget you can get HPV and herpes without having sex. Skin-to-skin contact with the infected area can transmit these infections.
- Know your partners—go with them for STI and HIV tests.
- Be sure ALL sex partners are examined and treated if you get a STI.
- Birth control pills do not prevent STIs. Use both condoms (rubbers) and birth control pills.
- Learn how to talk about condoms with all your sex partners.
- Learn the right way to use condoms. Use a new latex condom every time you have sex.
- Don't inject drugs—never share needles.

Research on preventing STIs

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has concluded that early, clear communication between parents and young people about sex is an important step in helping adolescents adopt and maintain protective sexual behaviors.

In addition, the CDC has identified key components for STI prevention efforts:

- Comprehensive school-based programs are critical for reaching youth before behaviors are established.
- Programs should be comprehensive, include a focus on delaying sexual behavior, and provide information on how sexually active young people can protect themselves.
- Community-based programs are needed to reach youth who are not in school. Addressing the needs of adolescents who are most vulnerable to HIV infection, such as homeless or runaway youth, juvenile offenders or school dropouts, is critically important.
- Confidential STI screening and treatment must play a role in prevention programs for young people.

**hot
links!**

Washington State STD Hotline 1-800-272-2437

Kids Health www.kidshealth.org

Health information for parents, teens and kids

Kaiser Family Foundation www.kff.org

Go to "Adolescent Sexual Health"

Planned Parenthood Federation of America www.plannedparenthood.org

Go to "STI Fact Sheet"

Washington State STD/TB Services www.doh.wa.gov/cfh/std/default.htm

Washington State HIV Prevention and Education www.doh.wa.gov/cfh/hiv_aids/Prev_Edu/default.htm

The Allan Guttmacher Institute www.agi-usa.org/sections/youth.html

Statistics and reports on youth

National Prevention Information Network www.cdcnpi.org

HIV/AIDS Among America's Youth www.cdc.gov/hiv/pubs/facts/youth.htm

I Wanna Know www.iwannaknow.org

American Social Health Association, Answers to questions about teen sexual health and STIs

Washington State Department of Health
DOH Pub 910-113 11/2003
www.doh.wa.gov

Resources listed here are provided as a public service and do not imply endorsement by the State of Washington.

References for source materials are available from the Child and Adolescent Health program, 360-236-3547.

For persons with disabilities, this document is available on request in other formats. Please call 1-800-525-0127.



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